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Harry Woll

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Woll, Harry, "Harry Woll, transcript only" (1975). *Lucille W. Brown and Stephen M. Berk Oral Histories of American Jews*. 28.
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Harry Woll

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Interviewed by Lucille Brown

Q. *Harry Laurence Woll*
Mr. Woll, would you tell me when you were born.

A. September 28, 1898.

Q. Where?

A. *Gomel*
~~Gommer~~, Russia.

Q. You were in white Russia, then?

A. Yeah, at that time it was Russia. *The* suburb was known as white Russia but it was *one* ~~Gommer~~, Russia.

Q. *yes, but*
It was different because the different parts, at one time it was also Poland, wasn't it.

A. No, we were on the border of Poland, *Not in Poland.*
on the border.

Q. Let's look at the map.

A. It has to be scientific more or less, therefore, you have to be careful.

Q. That's right. It's better now than after it is in print. I'd rather find out now than later but even so *I* rather I hadn't made that mistake if I am incorrect.

A. Bacha(?) was much closer to this town was much closer to Poland than we were.

Q. Your town was *Gomel*
~~Gommel~~. I've seen it on a map and that section was called white Russia?

A. That was called white Russia.

Q. And it was always Russian?

A. Always Russian. Always Russian.

Q. Did it never go back and forth between the two.

A. It could be at the time of *Chmielewiczki*
~~Ronitsky~~. That could be that but they over

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ran and took it over but I wouldn't consider that, they never did when I studied at the high school, the gymnasia and then in the college, they never considered this part of Poland that it belongs to Poland. It was white Russia. However, there were times when they controlled and then ^{in that respect} you are absolutely right.

Q. ^{O.K.} That's all I said, that it shifted back and forth.

A. They controlled. ^{Chmelnitzki} Minitschy that was it and the ^{Ukrainians} Eureranians that was the time when they were.

Q. ^{Now, and then} Again after the first World War, right, so I'm not incorrect. You gave me a scare there for a minute, Mr. Woll.

A. We grew ^{up with} off the idea that white Russia had nothing to do with Poland because Poland was far away. It wasn't so close, but through the history of these ^{East} European countries they have been capturing one the other then separating again so it's hard to tell. That was all under ^{Chmelnitzki} Minitschy. As a matter of fact, we Jews have a good reason to remember that time because during the fight between the Poles and the Ukrainians in the Jewish year of 408 now it is 737 but that was 408, we know it in Hebrew the expression Zana tauch and tauch(?) the ^{was a whatever} ^A walk happened, the misfortunes of these two years, 408 and 409, because the Poles massacred many Jews at that time. They overran that's what they caused-but never controlled it. That's it.

Q. So, you were born in ^{Gromel} Gromel and what was the nearest, you said ^{Minsk} Minsch was the nearest big city. ^{Minsk} Minsch was the nearest big city, right?

A. That was the nearest big city, ^{On one} alongside ^{Minsk} Minsch and the other side, about the same distance ^{Kiev, Ukraine} Kiev.

Q. Is that right?

A. Yeah. About the same distance.

A. So that would be between north and south almost. Kiev was south of you and ^{Minsk} Minsch was north of you. That puts you right in the middle of the ^{Pripet} ~~crooked~~ marshes. Right. [?]

A. That was known as ^{Polesi} ~~Polechy~~ and we were on the border of that. We lived there.

Q. Now was ^{Gomel a shtetel.} ~~Gommel~~ ^a ~~staple~~.

A. ^{No, Gomel} ~~Gommel~~ was by comparison a central city. We had no colleges but we had four high schools and we had a population close to 200,000 at the first World War. Later it changed a great deal. As a matter of fact the communists changed it instead of, you know that the Russian districts are named by ^{gubernyi} ~~Kubarney~~. We were ^{Minski gubernyi} ~~ministrative verney~~. We belonged to ^{Mogilevskaya} ~~Minseky~~ you see, ^{Mogilev} ~~That means~~ ^{Minsk, the gubernya} ~~Minsch Kubarney~~ was bordering on Poland and that was the influence of Poland there. ^{Mogilev} ~~Maharev~~ is closer to central Russia so the Polish had no influence, although in each and every town, you had a big synagogue built by either a prince of the ^{realm} ~~realm~~ or the government and a Russian church, ^{slavic} ~~slavic~~ and a Catholic because you had Poles living there too. It was close, but still didn't belong to Poland.

Q. So you had about 200,000 population?

A. About 200,000 variable 160,000 to 200,000 population.

Q. Was there industry in the town, ^{Now I am talking about before the first} World War?

A. Yeah, yeah, there was no industry there.

Q. What did most of the people do? How did they make a living?

A. I'll tell you. The Jewish people most of them were connected with ^{cutting} ~~trapping~~ wood in the forest, lumber that was their business and some of

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they were ^{occupied as tailors} ~~classified~~ ^{Artisans.} they ~~was~~ shoemakers, they never had an industry there, but since ^{Gomel} Bogart is on the River Souch that's the name of the river which comes in as I mentioned before, Kiev was not far, so a number of Jews occupied themselves with having ^{freight} ~~flag~~ ship boats heading south from Poland all the way to ^{Ukraine.} ~~East~~ (2) that was their business.

Q. I never heard that before Jews being engaged in water freight. Now we heard it. ^{there were quite some then.} At the time you are speaking of Russia controlled this portion

A. That's right. I was born in white Russia, belonging to Russia.

Q. Now for example, these water freight people, the Jews who were engaged in water carrying freight by water, did they have to have a special license from the Russian government?

A. Yes, they had to pay a certain fee for the right of doing this.

Q. And they were ^{permitted} committed to doing that?

A. Yeah, they were ^{permitted.}

Q. That was one of the avenues opened to them?

A. That's right you see there was one big factory in ^{Gomel} ~~Grumel~~ that belonged to the government to the railroad. They were fixing ^{up} ~~out~~ whatever cars and trains that they had to. No Jews would come in there, ^{they} wouldn't accept Jew^a there.

Q. ^{they would not?} That was government owned?

A. That's government owned. As a matter of fact, this was the first and the only group in that neighborhood that was a working element and had consideration for certain ideals of justice and fair play.

Q. From this factory?

A. From this factory, railroad factory.

Q. Are you saying that it was organized at all, ^{a union} was there some.

A. The factory was conducted by the government but we had in 1905 the first pogrom in Homel. That was the first and then there was a second one. During the second one...

Q. When was the second one?

A. If I'm not mistaken it was right after the first World War and groups of partisans occupied this town and ^{we} ready to destroy ^{and kill} a lot of us, so this, and they put fire, ^{they started a fire,} and it was a fire all over. These workers came enmasse and chased away this so that was the interesting thing. Labor had some chance although they were ^{anti-Semites, but} ~~so much with~~ a certain sense of fairness, fair play more or less and another group were the peasants from the villages, they came. There, it was a divided group. Some of them came to rob ^{take} to ~~pay for~~ whatever they could. Others came to help out. As a matter of fact they came with forks, with ^{axes} ~~axes~~, they had no ammunition and they came in to save the city. Not to save the Jews, but to save the city, but this is something that, as a child, I was very much impressed and that ^{moved} ~~most~~ most of us young people, ^{towards} ~~turned~~ socialism and labor, ^{We could see it in practice} ~~as a~~ _____. They came and they chased away the bandits.

Q. Now where were the bandits from?

A. They were usually deserters from the army, and then it was, you know the war ended with the socialist revolution. Not the ^{Bolshevik} ~~Belshi~~ The ^{Bolshevik} ~~Belshi~~ took over about three years later.

Q. No, no we are talking about 1905 now. You are talking about the second pogrom(?). Oh, okay. I'm a little mixed up.

A. The first pogrom, it was merely anti-semitic, you see one has to know way of life for the peasants. The peasants were very poor because

originally they would get so much land and then with the increase in the family the same parcel of land was divided among them. ^{with the result that} and then after three generations, they didn't have enough land, and they were starving. They were ^{very} really poor, and the government, the ^{czarist} southeast government, supplied them with a lot of whiskey. They had these places ^{where the government} to go and then they sold the whiskey ^{for a price.} They supplied them, so most of the time, they were drunk and they didn't have anything, they were almost naked, so it was easy for them to fall prey to any kind of education, any kind of talk, and because of poverty and because ^{need} ~~need~~ 2, they would go out and hear, ^{Rob! Take!} ~~rough things~~ and then there was something else, the people ^{have} ~~having~~ inherited long before, ^{not only} ~~it didn't come~~ with the government, ^{but} the people ^{have} ~~having~~ inherited from the time of ^{Chmielnitzky...} ~~Frenitsky (2)~~

you see the Poles controlled at that time part of Russia, so what they did, they rented out to Jews the control of the church, the control of everything and the peasants, the Russian peasants, ^{his} the child died, ^{he had to bury him} you had to pay because who collected the money, the Jew. The fact that the Jew had to pay almost as much to the Pole, ^{they} that, ^(?) didn't they didn't know, so they developed a certain hatred towards the Jew. Then the Jew, as you said before, there was no industry there. There were merchants, store keepers and small business-men, so the gentile, the peasant, ^{the} not a city worker, ^{the} a peasant, they would say ^{well} he walks around with his hands clean and makes me work and he gets the benefit, so that developed ^{fill} it was easy, especially when the government ^{was} ~~could~~ ^{backing} ~~making~~ this pogrom, and it was done on purpose so the peasant wouldn't have time to think about his own ^{fate} ~~with~~, so you had all kinds of people who couldn't find themselves and they would join these groups and that was the ^{pogrom} ~~program~~ and in many places it was a ^s ~~masacre~~ massacre.

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rather than ^{just a pogrom.} justice. It not only ruined business but ^{also} ~~mostly~~ killed people.

Q. But where the people in the factory came out and when the villages came out that was already about 19...

A. That was 1905. That was ^{in the} the first and ^{also in} the second ^{pogrom.} program both.

Q. Both times they came out?

A. Both times they came, yeah.

Q. Please again would you repeat the date of the second ^{pogrom} program so I could...

A. If I am not mistaken it was in ¹⁹¹⁷ 1913. It was right after the war.

Q. Was it before the Revolution or?

A. That was when the Revolution started. ^{In fact,} The Revolution gave a push

to these people and formed all kinds of groups, fighting the ^{Bolsheviks} ~~Bulshovichs~~ and

groups that supported them and they were fighting ^{them} and the Jew was the one ^{who} ~~the one who~~

who was ^{neither} ~~neither~~ in the labor ranks, he was a small businessman and that

was the anti-semitism. He had ^{stores, they were store owners, so the peasant} ~~at the present~~ wanted to get back just as

you had in here when you had these negros, the same thing to get whatever... ^{just}

and that was the thing. But of course they ^{would also kill people.} ~~were also guilty.~~ See the second

one was so pronounced that the we never knew who was in control of the

^{town or} ~~kanat~~ of the city. They changed hands every day, ^{Some} group would conquer

and kill a number of people and take over and then another group would come.

there were all kinds with the idea that they were fighting the ^{Bolsheviks} ~~Bulshovichs~~

and that was it, ^{so} we suffered and went through all this and don't forget that

when the ^{Bolsheviks} ~~Bulshovichs~~ took over the country, the country didn't produce the

stores were almost empty, ^{but in order to buy bread} for this the stores were almost empty and in order

to buy bread, the peasant needed ^{salt} ~~stores~~ (?), he had bread, ^{He lived on the farms} he lived in the villages

but he couldn't get salt, ^{So} we all used to take with us bags of salt, go about 30, 40, 50 miles to villages, exchange it for flour and bring it home and have bread.

Q. Now where did you get the salt from?

A. In the cities, we still had salt. We had salt in the cities, ^{So} we used to do that and ^{the peasant} a person couldn't eat without salt because he had to ^{the survival?} ~~the~~ meat(?) ^{or} of the bread. Without salt they used to get a sickness ^{known by} the name of singa. ^{TSingat (?)} Singa is the ~~Jews~~ or the jaws swell up and you couldn't eat and ^{you} die of starvation. ^{TSinga}

Q. You mean from the lack of salt?

A. Lack of salt.

Q. Is that why salt is so important?

A. Oh yes, salt prevents ^{TSinda} singa. ^{TSinda} Singa that was the name.

Q. What language is that?

A. I really don't know, I think it's a Russian it's a kind of it may be a ^{corrupted} expression. I don't think it's a medical thing.

Q. I didn't realize that it had a natural physiological basis in the body's need for it.

A. Oh singa, it was awful, ~~Without~~ salt. And then we reached the ^{end of} supplies salt, so we used to take whatever jewelry we had and go there and exchange it for salt.

Q. This was in 1917 after the Revolution.

A. That's right oh yes, that was after the War.

Q. Let's go back a little bit. Now when you were born your father was doing what? What kind of a family ^{were you in?}

A. My father had two jobs, two businesses. One during the summer and the other in the winter. During the summer, he was, they call it in Russia otpravitel. It means, a person who expedited the movement of certain goods from the railroad.

Q. Like a dispatcher?

A. No, not employed as. Not employed. My father was involved, you see Germany needed meat, they didn't have enough meat, so they would buy geese, geese were in Russia, so the Jews on the borderline with Germany ^{he -} they came ...

Q. Geese farmers.

A. Geese farmers and they would go into deep Russia into actually ^{Kursk} ~~Kursk~~ and all around the cities and buy from the farmers the geese, load them in a carload, 1400 to a carload and send them to Germany. But geese ^{would} ~~must stop~~ ~~was stopped~~. They cannot go without food or without water for more than a day and a half.

Q. Otherwise they will die on the way.

A. Die on the way, and the worst of it was, when a carload of geese would come to Germany it would just enter the borderline ^{If} they would find one goose dead they would condemn the whole carload, because they were afraid of some kind of epidemic, so they had to be careful, so when the geese come, my father had a big lot, about a block long that had places to keep carloads of geese, ^{with a} 1400 places ~~to the~~ fence.

Q. So they would let the geese out of the train.

A. Yes and they water for them ^{a lake, could swim} that they ~~would swim~~ so he was the ^{the} ~~the~~ ^{otpravitel} proprietor so the geese would come they would unload them and they would

come about 15/20 carloads a day. They would unload them, ^{set} them down to the ground.

Q. That's more than 24,000 geese.

A. Yes, sure. That's right, ^{back} and feed them, and the following day load them again and send them all the way out to the nearest stop which was in ^{Brest-Litovsk} Brest-Litovsk. That's where they would stop. So that's the summer job my father was busy with. Winter, he used to buy stones, sell it to the city, city government to pave the streets, ^{wherever they had} to fix, so he was supplying them with stones where he would buy them also somewhere away from small towns away from the city. So that was the job.

Q. Was your family comfortable, financially?

A. Yeah.

Q. Would you say you were middle class or lower middle class or upper or what?

A. We were middle class. Don't forget, ^T there were five brothers going to school and three daughters.

Q. You mean of the children?

A. The children and they had to pay ^{tuition fee} for each and every one. At that time it was about 160 ^{rubles} ~~rubles~~ a person.

Q. So you had four brothers and three sisters.

A. I had four brothers. ^{We} ~~There~~ were five brothers and three sisters.

Q. Eight children and your mother and father.

A. Yeah and he had to provide them. ^{Like the gymnasia.} The gymnasia cost a lot of money.

Q. And all the children had a gynmasia.

A. All the children had a gymnasia, all of them. ^{Graduated.} Some went to college

but then the War broke out. *That's what stopped it.*

Q. Were you the oldest or the youngest

A. I'm the oldest.

Q. *you're the oldest.* In ~~Gomel~~ ^{Gomel}, let's see if I can guess, no ~~hasidim~~ ^{Hasidim} (?) but your father was a *Mitnagid*?

A. He was an ~~eschenautic~~ ^{Askenazic} Jew, Not a Hasid, not a Mitnagid. But my grandmother belonged to a rabbi (?) she was ... but it didn't matter.

Q. She did, it didn't matter?

A. It didn't matter because she couldn't ... *influence anybody.*

Q. She had no control *over anybody.*

A. That's right, it didn't matter.

Q. Did you live in your ^{own} home?

A. Yeah.

Q. It had to be pretty large then.

A. It was a large house.

Q. Can you describe it?

A. It had, I had an extra room for myself.

Q. You did, that was very unusual.

A. That was unusual but I am telling you, ^a We built big house, there was a small house next to it which we rented out, ^{It wasn't the} couldn't get rent so much, ^{a poor man in a small house.} because mostly it was to help out, but we lived in a very big house, We had a master bedroom for father and mother, We had three rooms for children and I had, used to call it a ^{Kabinet} ~~cabinet~~ ^(?), a room of my own.

Q. Like an office.

A. Yes.

Q. Did you sleep there too?

A. Yeah.

Q. So were you the ~~only~~ one that had your own room.

A. The oldest ^ason. I had that and a dining room and a living room and a porch with screens on ^{to be modern,} and a kitchen and then we had built in ^{shacks} shelves. Then of course we had the buildings, the outside building of hay and a cow.

Q. Oh, you did. Now your mother had help I am presuming.

A. We had cook, a girl, ^{whose} her job was to ~~cook~~ and a girl to take care of the house or the building and ^{one, a man} then to take care of the needs of the yard chopping wood. Mother was, I don't know she may have been spoiled ⁱⁿ child-hood. She was raised not by her parents but by her mother's brother that didn't have any children. He was well to do so they spoiled her. She didn't have do anything and when she married, father and mother were cousins, ^{So} when she married ^{him} she thought that she could marry someone better ^{yet,} she was the frustrated intellectual. ^{So} she began to complain about illnesses and every time she didn't feel so good, they called the doctor. The doctor would come and ^{finally made up} ^{(?) what mother told us.} we ~~are~~ up what she told us. ¹ The doctor said, leave her in the room, lock the door and don't mind, ^{She'll} be well. In other words, there is nothing wrong with her, But of course father wouldn't do that and then she developed an angina, heart condition, ^{So} that was quite a job. She couldn't stand noise. The pavement as I mentioned before was rocks, ^{and} ^{So} the cars didn't have tires, ^{that} so it would make noise and everytime, she would be surprised she would get that feeling of a heart attack, ^{we didn't know about} ~~so even though we bought~~ nitroglycerin tablets ^{So} in those days, ~~there were none,~~ we used to take a pitcher of hot water with ^{We learned to take care of her.} mustard and put her hands in that. But to avoid these noises father bought

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because he was supplying the city,
hay and he got permission from the city and placed hay about a half a block
one way and half a block the other ^{the house} ~~it~~ was a corner so the wagons would pass
by it, wouldn't make any noise. That's how he took care of the princess.

Q. Well then he did try to take care of her.

A. Oh yes, he did.

Q. But don't forget she also had eight children, which is no small job.

A. Oh yes, and of course there were cousins ^{I told you, Father had money,} and family ^{father's side,} ^{other} ~~father's side,~~
^{now was father's side.} wasn't wealthy, so it was up to father and his brother and his uncle to provide ^{with}
whatever necessary to members of the family especially one sister and ^{when}
grandmother was alive to support her, and then to support most of the family
of my mother's side. They were his cousins. I told you family, But they
would come and stay with us one at a time or two, and help mother for five
or six weeks, so he needed room for them too.

Q. ^{I see.} So there was always a coming and a going, always a coming and a
going, always something. Plus eight children.

A. Right and then there's something else. I mentioned before the people
used to come from the border towns of Germany to buy geese and they would
send out people to do the buying, buy ten, twelve, fifteen, eighteen geese
from each farmer, ^{and} naturally you had to cover a lot of ground and then
bring it together, so these people, the peddlers with geese, who were coming,
they needed a place so they would eat with us, so that they could see father
^{and talk} and see other, so our house was like a big shopping center all the time, noise
and noise and noise.

Q. ^{Now} So when you look back on it, Mr. Woll, was it pleasant or not?

A. Was it pleasant? It was very pleasant for us, the youngsters to sit ^{and}

listen to the conversation. And father used to always send us away, Go on do your homework. Go on and read, because he was afraid, and it is an interesting thing about our father. I never had a kiss from my father, Never a good word, but mother used to tell us that he loved us so much, But he never it was the old time people, displayed it never showed it. We on the other hand, the children would never (END OF SIDE ONE)

Q. You were saying when you were sitting at the table, something.

A. We would never sit at the table, the children, before father sat down. That was a natural thing with us, And father had ^{his seat} ~~to sit~~ at the head of the table, all the time. Nobody would sit in his chair, That was father's, And while we never saw a display of affection, nevertheless, we respected father very much, thanks to mother, She used to tell us how eager he was to see that we were well and so on, But father was always complaining, Why don't you do this, why don't you do that, And I used to tell him, ^{already} I did my homework, I have no more homework. Sit down and write and I at that time developed a talent for writing ^{articles,} ~~people's~~ compositions and it was the case of Berks, when a Jew was accused.

Q. That was already 1913.

A. Approximately and I was about 15 years old. So I wrote an article about attorneys and about the whole thing, and as a youngster I poured out all I could didn't even consider what one may say and what one shouldn't say. And one day father said, Why don't you sit down and write, ^{you don't have} and I ~~had~~ to listen to ^{these} ~~the~~ things, And ^{we} ~~he~~ also had a tendency to go into the kitchen and listen to the cook and the stories that they would tell.

Q. Isn't that like children all over?

A. That's right.

Q. Father said *It's* taboo you stop going to the kitchen. You need something, *Call*, she'll bring it to you. I don't want you to waste time listening to these stories that they keep on telling. *So* we had no business in this. So he used to show this composition of mine to some of his friends,

A. And one of them said, you want to go to prison together with your family, because should ~~these~~ ^{this} paper~~s~~ fall into the hands of a policeman or an officer *of the police*, *you* clicked, because at that time the government—so he tore it, but he was proud that I did, *by* on the same token, I used to also write in Hebrew. He would also pick up something I wrote. *He* wasn't a scholar, *he* couldn't make *head or tail* out, but he would listen to me reading it and he would go and if a *bignabbi* visitor, he would show it to him and that was it.

Q. So instead you're saying, tell me if I am wrong, I hear you saying, he was proud of you but you never heard him say I love you.

A. No, never a kiss and never a good word, never.

Q. Did you feel that?

A. I inherited it. I am the same way. Although I know the *fault* of it but that's how we were brought up.

Q. You know it and you can't do anything about it.

A. *I* feel father funny if I would all of a sudden, I do now, my daughter, I would give her a kiss sometimes, *because* she would kiss me all the time, I would, but I feel...

Q. You couldn't do it to a son. Could you do it to a son. Kiss a son.

A. My son the same thing.

Q. Do you kiss him?

A. Yes.

Q. You could?

A. Sometimes. But we don't display this kind of affection, never.
which is wrong,
~~we sit down,~~ we missed it, we wanted it and the only thing that mother kept on
telling us and assuring how much he loved us.

Q. Was your mother an affectionate woman?

A. Mother, yes, yeah she was.

Q. So even though she was a princess, she was loving.

A. Yeah.

Q. It's very hard on the children not to be told.

A. *Definitely*
Definitely. I used to argue with my father, why don't you ever tell
me it's good. You always tell me the other thing. He said the good things
I don't have to tell you.

Q. But you do have to.

A. *but that was their psychology*
I know, ~~but that was the way at the time.~~

Q. I know, I talked to one man who said his father used to beat him
every day whether he did something wrong or not and the theory being that
if he missed a day ...

A. He would be worse. We never, *When I was a child,* mother would spank
me, father never did, *And she would never say I'll tell daddy about it.* Because
she knew that it would hurt him and he wouldn't do anything, *So she did it.*

Q. That's different.

A. But father would take us to synagogue.

Q. Was he a religious man?

A. He was not, no.

Q. But you say he was a traditional Jew.

A. Traditional Jew, but something happened you see. *When his father died*

and grandma remained ^{alone} he established there, not a synagogue but a gathering of a minyan to daven. and they kept on doing that for years, until they decided ^{its} no sense. She lived

in a basement, ^{the} upper floor was rented out. She had her own house. Decided, ^{lets}

to build a synagogue, ^{So,} and naturally who did they talk to, but the son, the oldest son of the family, ^{And} father agreed. ^{And} then they built a synagogue, a big

one, ^A corner one. It's an interesting story ~~how~~ the way they did it without

having money and collecting and selling ^{seats} ~~signs~~ (?) to people and each and every

one wanted to ^{beat} build the eastern wall and promise everybody, ^{And} you'll get

it, give \$300 and then when they finished and completed it, ^{it} was some synagogue.

they all came, now we have two ^{designate the seats.} ~~designated signs~~ so they have only 28 seats in

the eastern wall. People, they yelled and yelled, but what else could they do.

after all ^{she} big shots, but three of them were given certain seats, they were the

oldest ones, so somebody suggested, ^{draw lots and they draw lots} ~~throw out~~ and it came out as luck would

have it, they all shut up, ^{No more} ~~Even~~ God himself said it was all right.

Q. You mean the three noisey ones got the seats by the eastern wall.

A. ^{they got it} Yes, and not a word, ^{But} we didn't have a lot, so father naturally attended

there. We didn't have a chance to enjoy it very much because that was the

second War broke out. Second World War broke out and the commander

of the army, an uncle of the Czar, ..

Q. No the first world war.

A. [?] That was the first one.

Q. You are thinking of 1905, then the first one was 1914 right. [?]

A. ^{seems to me...} So they chased out all the Jews who lived in the towns on the border line.

Q. That was the first World War.

A. ^{since} And ~~his~~ father was always at the railroad station, had to do with his

he and a few others when they took to meet these victims of the law ^{if} the Czar's uncle and sometimes take them off the train and place them locally because they were sent all the way into Russia where they wouldn't find a Jew, ^{And the result would be they would be lost there.} some of them, rabbis, and some of them Yeshiva pupils. So they would take them off here, wouldn't let them go further, and arrange for them. Where do you put a trainload of people? the synagogue, so the synngogue was given over to them. We couldn't use the synagogue any more and they moved in and they lived there.

Q. So these ^{were} ~~are~~ people actually from further west. In other words they were coming from this way towards you. ^{From Poland and...} And then your father and a couple of others took them off the trains ...

A. ^{off the trains...} Not all of them, ^{but wherever they would and} that's how I managed to meet the greatest rabbis. They would come to our house...

Q. And they stayed in the synagogue. How long did they stay there?

A. Some of them stayed a year, some of them a little more and of course ^{clothing, I took over.} there was a question of supplying ~~them~~ with food and clothing. ^{The} Youngster that I was, I got hold-the government had certain organizations ~~country~~ ^{country} organizations that would supply coats and suits and clothing, so I would come and get it. ^{the Poles had it, so} At that time the Poles, they had a Joint Distribution Committee. I would go to them and they would hand it out together with our rabbis, who was interested in it and helped me out. I was a youngster and I was able to ^{and distribute it.} work my way through and get it for them and so we supplied them with clothes and winter clothes. They didn't have anything.

Q. But we started this, when I asked you whether your father was a religious man. You said no.

A. He wasn't. He used to go, I'll explain to you why.

Q. You mean in the traditional sense he was not.

A. He had to sign a paper one day and it happened to be on Friday night and mother felt uneasy. Here the children are sitting, it's ^{Shabbos,} Chava's he didn't mind it, so she said take it in the other room so the children wouldn't see. She was more religious than.

Q. Well, that's not what I mean by religious, but okay. She was more observant of the rules.

A. ^{More observant.} But we had a home with Jewish ^(?) council in the center. We observed every holiday faithfully and go to synagogue every Saturday. We had to go to synagogue.

Q. The whole family.

A. The whole family, father with his sons and we lived at a time, father was very proud of his children, and especially his first born, me. And when I was about eight years old I began to read the Torah in the synagogue on Saturday evening. Saturday morning, they wouldn't let me, I was too young and it was too much, but this I would do. And one day my father, ^{was it} the father or someone else, bought me a gift, ice skates, so I went out on the sidewalk and skated. ^I we didn't go to a rink, we didn't have such a thing, but around the house and one of the congregants of the synagogue saw me and he said, shame on you, you're skating like every non-Jewish boy and then you come to read the Torah. The skates were taken away.

Q. ^{Oh my!} So life was pretty restrictive in that sense, right.

A. Oh yes, it was restrictive and we lived in a certain limit. We ^{were taught} was told a number of things that we had to take care of. On the other hand we had also

experiences very pleasant for us because it was customary in Russia especially in the cities, that the poor people, ^{the} very poor, they would go and beg. They wouldn't beg in the streets but they had their ^{homes} ~~places~~ that they knew.

Q. Were these the ones with the chains and the shirts are you talking about Jews or non-Jews?

A. Non-Jews, but the beggars were Jewish. But they didn't have any chains.

Q. But the Christian beggars there were some...

A. The Christian beggars were something else, they were starving. But I'm talking about the Jewish beggars. They would come to our house every Thursday and mother would send out to them coins, ^{Each one,} they would come about 40/50 and she would hand out coins. When I was eight years old she took me, gave me some of these coins and said, hand them out and at that time I knew the value of a coin because for a penny you could go and buy a piece of cake. ^{So} I knew the value of it. Although we never were permitted to go and buy these things. Mother provided. There was candy in the house that ^{mother} ~~father~~ would ^{hand} ~~send~~ out. Instead of giving me a penny to go out and buy candy, here's a candy, that's all, ^{So} she taught us that money has value not only for what you can buy, but also what good you can do with it and that I appreciate. Ever since then I have learned ^{that lesson} that as a child of eight. We were not allowed to play cards, but on Hanakah we would all sit with father and mother and the relatives and all of the children and play cards, ^{IT WAS A} ~~and all the~~ ^{Certain} ~~second~~ game and win a penny. It was just to show to the children the way ^{what} Hanakah is and we would have Hanakah ^{get} ~~so that would be used.~~ ^{what we}

Father noticed that one of my brothers is too eager. He is not just playing but he wants to win, ~~No more.~~ ^{The} whole idea of cards out. We didn't play because he was afraid, he would become a gambler. That was out. No more. That's how we were restricted, but at the same time, when I grew a little older, I became involved in socialist activities. We had to have meetings, where are we going to have them, ^{so} we used our house.

Q. You did.

A. Yes, with father's permission and father would stand outside and watch if a policeman would come, ~~he would tell us.~~ ^{he would see that he wouldn't notice. He wouldn't come in there.} That's what we had.

Q. Was your father politically oriented in anyway.

A. No, no, he had, to give you an example, he had a little shop,

Q. Excuse me, if you get tired.

A. No, no, no I'm not tired. You see, I'm getting out of a cold and that's why in addition, father wanted to help out a relative and he ^{established.} ~~started~~ with him a shop in our yard, in ^a ~~our~~ building, ^{we had} ~~our~~ building. What was the shop? Making powder to sell.

Q. Powder?

A. Face powder.

Q. You mean for women?

A. That's right, and would pour in a little perfume in it and two girls were working packing it.

Q. What was it made of?

A. ^{Talc.} ~~Pop.~~ That's all and a little perfume and sell it to the peasants, ^{well, but this would go...} the city folks would go the drugstore and buy ^{that} ~~that~~ so one day my younger brother, the next one, passed away already, he came to father, ^{so the table} after dinner, ^{you}

see we had dinner at home always and lunch at home. With father even in his business he could come home and eat. ^AAnd he said, father you have to raise the salary of the two girls, ^Ootherwise I'll pull a strike. So father jokingly said, ^Ookay I can't afford to raise, ^{that's all.}so instead of giving you tuition fee, I'll give it to them as a raise, ^{and you ~~won't have~~ ^{want} to call a strike but I could see, that the way he spoke, with a smile on his face, he enjoyed it that his son had such an attitude towards this thing, ^Aand they got the raise, that's besides the point. But he jokingly said, I have no money, I can't afford, but this is how he was.}

Q. Did you speak Yiddish at home?

A. Yiddish. You see there too my answer is incorrect. ^{Since} ~~It seems~~ we had a ^{nyanya...} ~~nenna(?)~~

Q. A Polish ^{nyanya?} ~~nenna?~~

A. Russian. She would talk Russian to us, ^Sso we would also talk Russian. So but among ourselves with our father and our mother it was ~~always~~ ^{only} Yiddish.

Q. So you learned Russian easily because you had ^{nyanya,} ~~nenna.~~

A. Sure. Well I wouldn't call it Russian it was Russian, ^{it was} white Russian or what they call ^{KohKhlat'sky} ~~hofiausky.~~ A peasant is called ^{Khokho'l.} ~~ho-ho~~ ^{Khoklat'sky.} so it was ~~hofiausky~~

^A kind of language that ~~is~~ grammatically wrong and it has all kinds of idioms, that was what we learned from the girls.

Q. But there is a ^{belo} ~~yellow~~ Russian dialect

A. That's what we were, that's white Russian.

Q. That's the ~~one~~ we or you learned. We have something in the library I remember one time and people came and asked me if I could translate it

and I said it looks like Russian but there is something wrong because there were certain combinations of letters that didn't look similar to Russian and then finally we traced it to white Russian but I didn't know there was a white Russian language. It was white Russian.

A. As a matter of fact...

Q. What's the university in White Russia. There is a university in white Russia and what's the big one?

A. ^{Minsk Grodno} In ~~Minsch~~. Grommel has no university. It is already Lithuanian.

Q. ^{Minsk.} Maybe it was ~~Minsch~~.

A. ^{Minsk had it.} You see I grew up without knowing the white Russians had a language

of their own. We knew that the peasants speak a language ^{that is} ~~like this~~ grammatically wrong ^{and} when they use words for instance, to give an example... In Russian

^{sun schtze} the ~~sun~~ is ~~sonche~~, you don't pronounce the "l" in there, the word is ^{solntze} ~~sonche~~ but

you don't pronounce. In white Russian they don't put the L they say ^{solntze,} ~~sonche~~ ^{but you don't pronounce it,}

So it's hard to get. The time that we began to realize that and learn about it was after the Revolution and every small nationality began to put out whatever they had and that's where I found it out.

Q. So you spoke Yiddish. Now you must have had a Hebrew education.

A. Yes, I went to cheder ^I and then father had a very bad experience in ~~cheder~~ ^{rabbe, the} ~~heder~~. The teacher would sit at the head of the table and had a cane in his

hand and he or we were learning about Jacob taking the right ^{of the first born from} ~~from his son~~ Esau.

and I was so much engrossed in it, ^{and} that he cheated, so I said, ^{"what a} ~~what did they~~

cheat and the Rabbi with his cane hit me over my head and I knocked ^{on} the table and broke the nose. ^{here}

Q. That's a very upsetting story by the way, that Jacob ^{Esau} ~~Esau~~ story, by the way.

when you first read it.

Look, about these stories we can tell a lot of things.

A. Of course our ~~sadish~~ ^{sages} find it difficult to justify, so they cover it up

she ~~with ideas that first of all the difference with~~ ^{that she would be different if Esau would have} the right of first born, but

this is like written ^{like with a fork on} with ice and water, ^{stay} Doesn't straight. The fact of the

matter is that this is what ^{he did, that's all.} ~~it is~~ and there are many things but ^{that} ~~you~~ you

^{not when you...} start thinking and seeing when you grow older, ^{So} I came home and caused

a job with my nose and so on and father decided, ^{rather than...} we used to go to ~~Hager~~ ^{cheder} from

morning until evening and winter time, Russian winters ^{sets} setting at 4:00 and

you would have to go in the dark, ^{cheder} so he decided no more ~~Hager~~. He engaged

a teacher who would come to our house and teach me and my brothers, three

hours a day and would get extra pay, ^{the teacher} and that was when I began to have a

different kind of education. Frankly the teachers changed every two or three

years. Some of them were doing an excellent job. One of them, I recall,

decided rather than to teach me and my brothers the things you were

supposed to, he would play chess, ^{So} we played chess.

Q. Nobody told your father.

A. No. Then one liked Hebrew composition and he detected that I had ability, so all I did he was my teacher, write compositions and he would read and make corrections and tell me keep on writing, ^{So} instead of learning anything I did writing. That's how I got my Jewish education.

Q. Now was this supposed to include religious instruction as well?

A. Yes. There was only one kind. *Religious. There was no other kind.*

Q. At that time you weren't learning modern Hebrew yet.

A. That was Hebrew that we learned.

Q. Scripture Hebrew what about spoken Hebrew, modern Hebrew.

A. We developed it ourselves.

Q. You did.

A. Sure. We didn't have the vocabulary that later on we developed and ^{we} began to read modern literature, but that was it. Don't forget, I've had an experience here with my job with issuing licenses to teachers, Hebrew teachers. ^{Giving exams and issuing licenses.} To give an example, One day a man from Israel came and I asked him what he had, papers and all this and I told him what he is to do and speaking in Hebrew of course and I see he sits and looks at me, he doesn't budge. I said, what are you looking at me. He said I'm listening you are speaking the language of the bible. It wasn't the language that he was accustomed to. It was the bible, because we have no other source just the bible and that's all. No literature, we don't use it daily, Now we begin to use it daily too.

Q. So he was astonished at your speaking to him in Biblical Hebrew.

A. Yes, he said you speak the Tanach. I find it difficult now to accept some of the expressions in Hebrew they use in Israel.

Q. The modern Hebrew you mean.

A. Not modern. It is an illiterate, for instance they will end a sentence on ^{one} ~~low~~ letter ^{she} ~~af~~ and then you have "she ha yeled", or whatever it is.

Q. But that's not a complete sentence.

A. ^{But} That's how they talk. So I disliked it very much. But they now use a vocabulary that is, first of all ^{they needed} new terms and ^{they're} creating and they keep on changing, modifying them to be supposed to give it ^a the special Hebrew thing. So and they have a lot of Arabic words now in there and I find it difficult very often even though I became here a professional translator of Hebrew. I get paid for that.

Q. And you still have a problem.

A. Yes.

Q. Now in these, when you had these teachers coming to the house, all five boys were being taught. When the teachers were coming to the house...

A. The oldest two and the youngest two they still went to school. The youngest two and the oldest two ^{just private} had the teacher.

Q. Well there should be three. Weren't there five boys.

A. ^{altogether,} Five boys but the youngest one was born much later, ^{He} was 14 years old when they came to America, ^{he} was the younger one. Of five only one ^{I, of them} remains, four died. Sorry I interrupted you.

Q. ^{That's hard.} In the Hebrew, you learned ^{Tanach} ~~kanoch~~ (?) and to pray, ^{davening} ~~devening~~ (?) and then reading and writing, ^{Talmud} ~~calman~~. Now then you had to have a secular education from what you say. You also had a secular education. [?]

A. Oh yes, I went to gymnasia.

Q. In order to get into gymnasia you had to have something else didn't you? [?]

A. At home I learned to read on my own. ^{We} used to get a paper, the newspaper a Russian paper. Father subscribed and the paper, the name of the paper, was ^{Birzheviy Vedomosti} ~~Beregoviy Vedomosti~~ (?) so I heard the words and I began to read the headings, ^{I bothered} so this is big ~~snatch~~ that is how ~~our father and~~ mother and I finally learned the alphabet and I learned to read.

Q. Now would you tell it for me again so I can, what's the name of the paper?

A. ^{Birzheviy Bursa.} ^{Bursa} ^{the F.} [?] ~~Beregoviy Bursa~~ In Russia, its ~~Bursa~~, you know ~~they~~ exchange, ^{and we call it Bursa.}
(END OF TAPE #1).

Q. So it was like a commercial newspaper that your father *read*.

A. Father used to get.

Q. Was it Russian or white Russian paper.

A. No, that was Russian. White Russian, *hardly*, before the revolution they didn't even know there was such a thing and then they used to publish ... they even do it now, they published ^{not} literature. No writer writes a book ⁱⁿ ~~en~~ that language. It is a peasant expression of the Russian language. So I learned to read and then time was to go to gymnasia. Gymnasia was all day and the Hebrew teacher would come in the afternoon.

Q. Did you have trouble getting into gymnasia?

A. That's what I am going to tell you. Now to enter the gymnasia, there was the government controlled gymnasia and there was, *Gomel*, and we had in *Gomel* a privately owned Jewish gymnasia and with certain restrictions, I'll explain to you what they are. So the two of us, I and my younger brother, the two of us, together we learned Hebrew and together we prepared for the exams to enter the gymnasia. To enter the gymnasia-the government ^{where} but the tuition was very small, there was ^{a *numerus clausus*} ~~numerous courses~~ Only a Jew wanted to enter he had to pay the tuition for fourteen non-Jews, so that they could take in the Jew.

Q. 14?

A. 14 non-Jews, pay their tuition, make ^{them} ~~they~~ go and ^{pray to God that they} ~~pay together~~ they go so *his son would be able, ... would be admitted.*

Q. Is that what that ^{*numerus clausus*} ~~numerous clause~~ meant in action? I thought it just meant that they wouldn't admit ~~any~~ more than a certain number.

Q. No, no it meant you were going to get a percentage and the percentage

was 14 non-Jews to one Jew.

Q. But the Jew had to pay for the 14.

If you couldn't get any 14... otherwise they didn't have it.

A. Of course, ~~otherwise you couldn't get it~~ In addition to that, you had

to have high grades. Well, we took the exam, my brother had high grades

and he happened to have the 14 non-Jews without having to pay, They were

registered. He was accepted in the government gymnasium. I, who had lower

grades than he, ^{to} I was accepted in the privately owned Jewish gymnasium. Now

the difference was, that at the end of the fourth year and the sixth and the

eighth year we had to have special exams. Teachers of the government

gymnasium would be delegated to give us exams and if we passed, we used to

call it deputatski exameni. Deputat
~~jeopatsky exameni~~ ^{the} teacher is a delegate, and they naturally hated

Jews and they hated our going to colleges and so on, so they were asking

questions, not necessarily part of what you studied. You were responsible

for everything and tuition fee was much higher there.

Q. At the private school.

A. At the private school, ^{It was a} ~~the~~ Jewish owned school. So I had the fourth

year exam, the sixth year and then the eighth, which gave me the right to

enter college and there again the same story ^{with the numerous clauses.} there you had ^{to what you used}
^{to think it was, there, you had} a certain percentage of Jews. But the Revolution broke out, I only began to

^I go to medical school and [^] had to cut out.

Q. You wanted to go to medical school.

A. Yeah, I wanted to go to medical school and I cut out and that is where

^{that} I heard [^] my parents are in trouble, ^{are trying to...} that some of the rebels against the

government [^] as I said before, they used to come, banks, so I had to come

home.

Q. You weren't home?

A. No in ^{Kharkov} ~~Franklin~~ in the university. ^{Kharkov, at} ~~Franklin~~ had the university.

Q. So you started.

A. Yeah, I started and my brother started, and he ^{didn't have the} ~~had~~ difficulty, but he too had to give up in the middle. He almost got through there. He had to finish when he came here and get his degree as an engineer so he got his degree here and he got immediately a job with the Federal Power Commission in Washington, ^{So} ~~and~~ that was it.

Q. But the gymnasium was in ^{Gomel} ~~Gommell~~.

A. The gymnasium was in ^{Gomel} ~~gommell~~.

Q. And you went to the gymnasium until what year?

A. Until the end of the eighth year.

Q. I know, but what year was it in, like 19 what?

A. ^{Let me recall:} I don't remember.

Q. Was it during the war?

A. During the war yes. ^{I think it was.} ~~Figure it out.~~

Q. ~~Figure it out,~~ You were born in 1898 and when did you start gymnasium?

A. I think in my eighth year.

Q. So that's about 1906 and how many years is gymnasium, eight, so it is 1914 so you would finish it just about when the war started. So you were not home.

A. No, then I was home and I went to ^{Kharkov} ~~Franklin~~.

Q. Do you remember being home after the World War started, the first war?

A. After the first World War started, I didn't leave home, I was too.

young.

Q. You were still at home so you must have still been in gymnasia

then. Do you remember anything about the War itself how it affected

~~Gomel~~ ^{Gomel} ~~Gomel~~. How the war affected ~~Gomel~~.

A. Well the first World war had an affect that I wasn't able to remember I was just too young.

Q. I mean in the city itself.

A. Bringing new people to the town, that's all, the population increased.

Q. People fleeing.

A. ^{Fleeing and that} Not only ~~they~~ but people who lived Jewish people one or two families in a village, they found ^{that} safety was with the rest of the Jews ^{so they fled.} but then there was also restrictions on the part of the government in the business of the Jew in the village. Certain things he couldn't do that he used to do before. For instance, a Jew used to make a living from selling whiskey to the peasants. The government took it away, he wasn't allowed to do it anymore.

Q. During the war?

A. Before the war and during the war, ^{So} they had to run, ^{They} had no business. Then there were other difficulties made, ^{So} some of them found - when there were five or six families, it was more or less safer this way. ^{So} they come to the city, ^{And} then some of them had children they wanted them to grow up Jewishly, ^{so} they had to come to the city, ^{So} the population increased during the, before the second War, that was a different story.

Q. Wait a minute, how late were you in Europe?

A. I left ^{Gomel} ~~Gomel~~ in 1919. I came here in 1920.

Q. I don't want to go past that time. So ^{Gomel} ~~Gomel~~ itself as far as you

remember was not affected by the war, wasn't occupied.

A. No it wasn't occupied.

Q. And it wasn't shelled or bombarded but there was a population increase.

A. Population increase and that's about all.

Q. Was there any food shortage or any other kind.

A. No during the first War there was no food shortage, no problem.

Q. Did you have Russian Jews coming into your city?

A. Russian Jews?

Q. Yeah coming from the East.

A. No. *No.*

Q. So the war goes on and then comes the collapse of the Russian government and the ^{*overthrow of the*} Czar. ^{*Now in your family,*} was there political awareness of what was going on in Russia? ^{*and Kerensky.*}

A. Yeah, I was active and my brother *Too.*

Q. That's right you were a socialist. Now which party did you belong to?

A. The Jewish party of the Labor Zionist, ^{*Pasle Zion.*} ~~Pedencian(?)~~. My brother ^{*Bund.*} didn't agree with me and he joined the Socialist Party of the ~~Vand.~~ He ^{*when we come to our country*} didn't want to accept the theory that the Zionists have that they will have all the problems solved. He said I want to solve them right here. So we went different ways. Then of course friends influenced a great deal. ^{*we*} At that time, we acquired a number of friends and ~~you~~ became active each one in his own way.

Q. So he was active in the ^{*Bund*} ~~Bund~~ and you were active in the ^{*Pasle Zion.*} ~~Pedencian.~~

But neither of you were active in the Social Democratic or the Social Revolutionary, Socialist Revolutionary party.

A. ^{Yes, AS} Zionists ^{we} were active, ^{we} participated in that definitely.

Q. Were you following what was happening in the whole Socialist movement at the International congresses and so on. ^{? the split?}

A. I didn't attend but I followed that.

Q. Now when they split, who was it, the Bund ~~to~~ left the party, the Socialist party and that left Lenin in control actually.

A. Lenin was in control that was why he was called Bolshevic. ^{They wanted} the maximum and the Mensheviks, ^{Plekhanov and the rest of them} wanted at least a minimum for the time being and he came in, Lenin came in, and that is when he declared the Revolution and that's ^{where} ~~when~~ the army we were still at War with the Germans and he said, go home, ^{and} the Army went and you witnessed a remarkable thing. ^{For} Soldiers, ~~were~~ fighting soldiers, those who were on the way home were angry with the soldiers who still went ^{to the front,} and they were fighting each other in every town, whenever they would meet, Russian soldiers and chaos set in. There was chaos and ~~they rushed~~ down the war stopped and the Revolution was declared, ^{and} we visited in ^{Gomel} ~~Gomel~~, around the outskirts of ^{Gomel} ~~Gomel~~, there was a big ^{estate} ~~estate~~ of a prince of the government and we weren't allowed, the people weren't allowed to come in. The Revolution broke so we all went there to see the palace and all this, ^{and} after five days, where not a single soul in Russia worked, there was no work everything stopped, everything, completely.

Q. When was this?

A. That was when the Revolution broke out.

Q. Do you remember which days it was. It was in October.

A. I would have to look it up, But the first five days, I walked the aisles of the park up to my knees, in you know, we have the seeds the black seeds that we eat ^{in Russia,} ~~around here.~~ semke, semochke,

Q. They are not sunflower seeds.

A. Sunflower seeds, we ate it, ^Tthere was so much I walked, this is no exaggeration, up to my knees in the shells of the sunflowers, because people walked down of course ^{after} ~~that had been~~ a week, you wouldn't recognize the palace, ^{then} What ever there was they tore it down, but they realized that to keep going you have to eat. The bakers didn't bake, You couldn't get anything, Nobody worked, ^IIt was a holiday, But then they began, the comunists began to demand more and more and that's where the ^{fighting} ~~trouble~~ began. On one hand you had the comunists, the Bolshevics, taking over, and on the other hand you had bandits, supposedly fighting the comunists and in the meantime robbing and fighting the people. It was an unreal life.

Q. Did your family ^{suffer during this period?} You were witness to these things, You were walking knee deep, that must have been an awful lot of people and an awful lot of days just sitting and eating sunflower seeds.

A. That's right, the whole town, everybody was there walking and eating sunflowers. I'll tell you I'll never forget that picture. There were a number of pictures that my eyes saw in connection with the Revolution.

Q. Like what?

A. I told you the palace, the first day, there were ^{walls} ~~beats~~ with paper, walls covered with beautiful things and on the fifth day they ^{tore} ~~turn~~ it down, because it seems that somebody said the Russian expression Grabne, Grablenoi

Harry Woll

#34

Take it away.
Rob the things that the others robbed before you, so what ever they couldn't
they take, *then they* destroyed, *ed* and began to force people to go to work. There was no other
way, *you* couldn't get food.

Q. Now this was in *Gomel* Gomel itself.

A. In *Gomel* Gomel, it was everywhere. *(Interruption as guests come in, then leave.)* They had it in their own way, quite
different, because the echos of the Revolution came there.

Q. Only the echos, *you* are saying the Revolution itself came.

A. Yeah, we saw it we were meeting the trains.

Q. What do you mean you were meeting the trains?

A. *Trotsky came* To *Gomel address* Gomel and we went to see him and we were Revolutionary *yes.*

Q. What did you do as a Revolutionary?

A. *Before* Report the Revolution, we had meetings and made plans and argued
and discussed all kinds of political resolutions that we were going to

introduce and we were going to do this. Some questions, *which* some of us thought

that the Garden of Eden is coming down to us. That's my sister. *(People come in.)*

Q. You said you experienced the Revolution in *Gomel* Gomel, right, and I said

how? *?* How were you active and so you began telling me you took part in
debates and resolutions and so on and some of us thought the garden of eden
had come.

A. Before the Revolution we kept on thinking and believing that everything
will be resolved, but then the Revolution came, and we saw a different story.

First of all, it didn't happen immediately but during the time there was shortage
of food and *Lenin* ~~Lenin~~ had to permit small businessmen to go out and do

business in order to bring food and that was where we used to go with our

bags, *the* *we* *weren't running on time.* trains where possible, *if* ~~one came on time and you~~ all you needed was

a jacket of leather and yell, I am a ^{COMMISSAR} ~~commander~~, and you would get anything you wanted. I myself used that on the way from ^{Kharkov} ~~Harder~~ on the way home.

Q. You did?

A. Yes, I couldn't get a train. I got stuck in a station there no train, and I had no choice, I had to get out, and there were a few women ^{landsmen,} people I knew from home, they saw me, let's get out, they are staying there already three days and I am rushing home because of the report I got about the dangers to my father and my mother. I also heard something else, that at the university while I was absent and they knew ^{here that I am against the Bolsheviks} ~~at the time the Socialist~~ I'm a Menshevik, a Socialist, they condemned me to death, and I was told ahead of time so I fled from there too, because they would have gotten me. In those days, there was such disorder, that people had guns carrying with them, those who were entitled, and those who were not entitled and anything ^{wrong} ~~was~~ the saying ^{was, Exchenka,} ~~was~~ exchange against the wall and kill right there and then, ^{There} were no two ways about it, so I was rushing home and then I came into the man in charge of the station of the railroad and I told him I am running from the Ukraine to the ^{Frontier Minsk,} ~~frontier near Minsk~~ the white Russian frontier, and I had my staff with me and I must get out as fast as I can, when is the next train? He said there is an army train passing by here in about an hour. All right, ^{See to it and of course} ~~he thought that I am next to Trotsky.~~ ~~proceed at the time~~ So, lo and behold, he cleared a place in a car and I and these old women and a couple of men, that's my staff, ^{overhead} ~~overhead~~ soldiers saying, who in the heck is he taking, but ^{we were not asked} ~~Questions,~~ anymore because you couldn't get an answer that was correct, ^{anything went.} and I went home like this in a special train, there was no other way, so all you could do is bluff your way through otherwise you had no chance.

Q. You had no chance if you couldn't bluff.

A. If you couldn't bluff, *If you couldn't bluff, you couldn't get by.* you couldn't get food, ~~you couldn't walk~~ you couldn't get by, you couldn't get from place to place. For traveling, each one had to have a special permit, everytime he is traveling. Try and get it, you have to stand in line for days and then they start asking questions, so you travel without.

Q. You take a chance then.

A. You simply appeared *as second to Trotsky or Lenin's brother.* as I said, Trotsky so a lot of nerve, on the basis of your nerve, you were able to get by, and I did that, I had to use it.

The second time, it was different. The second time I was ^{also} traveling home from ~~Harper~~ *Kharkov* and I came to that station. That station is only one building for the

depot and the rest of it is ^{field} filled and the ^{field} filled was covered with people, each one, they had a fire and sitting around the fire. It was a ^{full} ~~full~~ night, and I

also, I traveled, instead of, normally you travel five hours, I traveled two days already. I was tired and hungry, It was night, so I came near one fire and I sat down there and I think I fell asleep. ^A And all of a sudden somebody hit me, ^I get up. ^A Woke up, What's the matter? A man sitting next to me and said,

These are very bad times. You have to keep away from traveling. ^A And don't fall asleep. The rumors here are very bad, ugly. ^A And I didn't wear a army uniform, I wore a coat which meant that I am a civilian, ^{So} naturally first to go would be the civilians, ^{So} I thanked him and I didn't sleep any more.

There was no other car to go. Then we got into a freight car, We got in there, dark and there were some people there already from preceding stations and he sat near me. Who he is or what he is I don't know.

Q. You still don't know.

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A. No. He is going also to ^{Minsk} ~~Minsch~~ and I am going to ^{Gomel} ~~Gommel~~ it's on the way and in the dark I didn't know what or when, ^A and we were sitting up all night long, approaching my home town. I could recognize the lights of the suburban homes and I became very eager to get out of this already, ^A and he held me back. He said take it easy, take it easy.

Q. What language did he speak?

A. Russian. Take it easy and as we approached, we heard from the outside, ^{it was about} a man standing there, less than about a mile from the depot, so we walk over that mile and be done with it. We heard someone saying, ^E Everybody out, ^A and then as they came near ^{us} the man standing there with a gun, a rifle and he questioned ^A Jew or not?

Q. Parudsky. Po russki.

A. ^{Po russki.} ~~Parudsky~~ And there was a couple of Jews ahead of me, ^N no sooner did they say yes, ^T they were hit with the rifle right there and then. I was lost what am I to do, ^S so he held on to me. He followed me, ^H he was next to me, ^A and same question ^A Jew? so he answered, ^N No, both are Gentiles. He answered that question ^G go ahead. On the way to the railroad station ^{to} the depot, that mile, we heard noises from there, drunken noises and yells and shouting and crying, ^W we were stopped a number of times and everybody, the same question, ^A Jew? because I wore civilian clothes and he answered, ^I I realized that I had to keep quiet, ^H he did the answering. Finally we reached the station, ^W we walked into the room of the ^I I see people, sitting, and a number of Jews standing among them, my uncle, I turned, ^H he held ^{on} ~~out~~ to me, ^S sit down, ^S sit here, ^A and again I sat down, ^A and again people around us were peasants, soldiers, gentiles, ^A a group

of gentiles and there are the Jews. So when I just made a motion to my
uncle, ^{he} ~~to~~ recognized me, ^{and} he probably wanted to say something and I saw how
they ^{hit} ~~hit~~ him right there and then, ^{so} I realized I am in danger and I have
no choice, ^{so} he began to talk to me aloud and addressing me, ^{In} Russian,
you address by name and father's name, addressing me with absolutely no
^a doubt, Russian name my father is Ivon and I'm ^{Stepan Ivanovich,} Shepon Evenovich. I

realized he was doing it on purpose and I answered him, ^{and} he thought ~~we~~
~~that tomorrow we'd probably make an end to the town~~
~~would travel tomorrow~~ because we could hear shooting, ^{there} and we ^{sat} stayed
that way all night long until the rest of the night, ^{until dawn came because it became} ~~because came~~ a little light
and I said, I will go now. He said, all right I will take you to the outside, to
the door. ^{He said,} Promise me you won't travel anymore, ^{for you} it is not the time to travel.

Q. He said? ^{To you?}

A. He said, to me, I should promise. All I want, I said, is to see my father
and my mother, and that's all I need. I wouldn't travel, I have had enough ^{of it}
already. ^{not knowing yet his name, not} And he said good-bye, we shook hands, I thanked him, ^{and} not asking
~~his name~~ not knowing who he is or what he is, and in front, outside the station
house, ^{an open} in front there is a big place ^{where,} ~~a local~~ place, about five blocks, ^{open} it's
for taxis to drive in and so on, ^{and} I joined a group of peasants and I went
with them across this big open space.

Q. Like a ^{plashad,} ~~plachade~~ no

A. I was in a dark coat and they wore the regular peasant coats, ^{these} ~~these~~
^{that they had.} sheep skins and as ^{they} ~~we~~ were walking I heard a shot, ^{and} the group spread, it
was—they were shooting towards me because ~~they~~ saw a black coat walking,
that's a civilian. In the city we could hear bombs and all kinds of yells.

Finally I reached home. I came into the house and mother said, ^{Hide} in the hay because we already had three groups that came looking for money and trying to kill. They ^{see} a young man, they'll kill you. ^{So} I hid in the hayloft, in the hay. And sure enough they came, but they didn't try to look in the hay. They looked around and nobody and they took whatever ^{they} could and in the morning, a little later when they left, I went down and I said, let's get out. Couldn't travel but let's get out, ^{we} you couldn't and that's when the peasants came and chased away the bandits, ^{so} that's how we were saved. The peasants came and chased, it was a group of bandits who took advantage—they killed a number of Jews in town and they controlled the town for about two days prior to my coming in. That's when the peasants came and chased them away.

Q. Now what year was that do you remember, was it after the Revolution?

A. That was after ^{the Revolution,} ~~the year~~ the first year of the Revolution.

Q. About 1918 then.

A. Approximately and that was that.

Q. And you never found out the man's name.

A. No but I told mother about it, and she said, ^{It} must have been an angel because to go out of his way to protect me and that meant danger for him too, because there were no questions asked, They would kill people without asking any questions. *They did whatever each one wanted.*

Q. Do you think the man was a Jew?

A. I have no idea. I have no idea. He told me he is a follower of Tolstoy. We had to talk about something ^{in the dark} so we are talking things of cultural. . . it turned out to be a cultural man, quite intelligent, said he was a follower of Tolstoi.

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Q. So he could have been either ^{a Russian} Tolstoy or a Jew?
~~these~~

A. Yeah. I had a lot of experiences.

Q. Now when did you leave ^{Gomel} ~~Gomel~~ and ~~How?~~ ^{How?}

(END OF SIDE ONE)

A. I went to visit her and I came and I couldn't go back, ^{for the} stayed there
~~four years.~~

Q. Where was she living

A. In a small town I told you.

Q. I know, where in white Russia also?

A. White Russia not far from ^{Gomel} ~~Gomel~~, just about an hour by train, and
then an hour by horse and wagon, and I stayed there a whole year.

Q. You couldn't get out?

A. There was no place to go. Couldn't get the ^{Poles, the Polaks} ~~Polacks~~ were fighting
the Russians, ^{So} the Russians were fighting the Polacks, we decided to get out
and we developed a fear, feeling knowledge of God in the morning you would
look at the houses and have ^{the} ~~the~~ feeling, the houses are ~~sad~~ ^{see} They are crying,
trouble is brewing. Come out and ^{see} ~~see~~, the houses look bright, ~~Nothing~~ will

happen today. We could see that we are exposed in a small town to almost
any kind of ^{piracy} ~~vandalism~~, ^{or} So in the meantime, a niece of my wife, ^{whose} ~~her~~ husband
went to America ^{in order to} ~~and~~ earned a few dollars and bring over his wife and child.
She lived ~~also~~ with a niece of hers and he made money and he sent a delegate
from there to pick up a few people, also his wife. He couldn't reach us, ^{So we had to get there.} ~~He~~
was already in a distant town away from us. [^] We got married and hired that
Polish soldier and he took us in a wagon and took us all the way to that little
station town, that we could board the train.

Q. Where was the station town?

A. That was Capaterish(?) you wouldn't find it

Q. I know but where was it, was it north of you or . .

A. North.

Q. Was it towards ^{Minsk} Minsk?

A. Between ^{Volhyn} Volhyn and Poland. So on the way, he was stopped a few

times and the answer was, I am taking prisoners. *Because prisoners they wouldn't bother.*

Q. You were lucky he didn't turn you in, he could have turned coat,

He could have changed his mind, right?

A. He could have, *that was life there.* and we came to that little town there was one ^{Jewish} ~~little~~

house we knocked at the door, *It* was early in the morning and the owner came out, *Please* get away, *The* Polish major is sleeping now, and God forbid, *And* all around us soldiers, the front was getting closer and closer, Polish soldiers. Well there was no place, *We* couldn't stay there because if you stayed in the open you were open for every soldier to do what he wants.

A freight train came. We got into a car of the freight train; my wife, I, a niece and daughter and two other women of that town, ^{the} who also a delegate brought money from their husbands to take them. We got in there.

During the year, ^{that} I spent with them, in the small town, the Poles, they controlled the town at that time, ^{Bolsheviks were on} the ~~Polish~~ and the other side. There was a major, a

Polish major. There was a Jewish doctor and they used to come to the doctor's house, a single man, not married, and play cards to entertain the Polish major, *And* I don't know what happened but this major told the . . .

someone in the office, I don't know who it was, ^{upper echelon} ~~operational~~ or somebody that

it was I that helped to put a bomb under a railroad bridge so that the Polish train coming to the border, and accused me of being a leader of a communist

group. He told it not to me not to my face, but he told it to some of the others as I said upper echelon and as we traveled, just about one or two stations, somebody came over to the car-train and told us to get out and you're so and so, yes, and you are under arrest. And he told me what I am arrested for, and he is taking us, all of us, to the nearest ^{larger} largest town — ^{Luninets} ~~Lunden~~ are the largest ^{er} town, and we heard about ^{hnenets} ~~Ludenich~~ that over there there was a police station of the military police that no one ever come out alive from there. We had a friend who was a living communist, who wrote us letters. He was in Moscow ^{So} we began to ^{save} send the letters while traveling by night and throwing them out on the road so they wouldn't find it with us. He brought us to a stable and put us in the hayloft. There were also two other peasants whose guilt ^{that} was they had been driving the Polish soldiers from the villages all the way out, until spending days with them, and they wanted to give up the whole thing, they wanted to go home. So they were arrested and they were brought here too under accusations. And here is not a soul nobody is coming. Nobody is saying.

Q. Now whose jurisdiction is this, this is Polish jurisdiction?

A. Polish jurisdiction. Now before that I was very active in ^{Pinsk} ~~Spinchs~~(?) a big town, there was a committee to help the Jewish people all around and I was active there, so there was a soldier whom my wife knew, who used to be a neighbor of theirs. She asked him to go in ^{Pinsk} ~~Spinchs~~ to these various people, certain names, and tell them that they arrested me, so that they could do something about it. On the walls of that place, there was inscription — please notify my wife and children that on that day I was taken out to be shot — ~~the name~~ please notify ^{my parents} that on that day I was shot. There were dozens of these

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inscriptions, ^{and were killed #43} People who were there, ^{It was a} because a famous police station a military police ^{called it.} Devonte Pasterynik (?) that's what they. Posternich is in Polish ^{deviunte is the Ninth,} a department, ^{well} ~~denote is denied~~ that was the army, but we realized where we are. What do you do? At least to notify our relatives our parents where we are. So we stayed there all night long, and no bread, no food, no laboratory no nothing and you hear the women and the men, a hayloft. So the children began to know, ^{sensed the} they ~~started to fear~~, they began to cry, loud. My wife was sitting and looking out of the small window in the hayloft and the noises of crying I suppose attracted a woman, so she told her, what is it please we didn't eat bread, we need water, ^{Give us} and we don't know where we are, and she wouldn't budge. This went on all night. In the morning the officer of the military police not of that one, ^{luck,} that was our ^{Pinsk} ~~Spinsch~~, further, closer to Poland and another one came in. The other one didn't know what this one did. ^{I knew nothing} So one of them a young fellow came over I said let my wife go ^{the kids,} and buy bread for them, Will she come back? I said, of course, I am here, ^{we're} ~~all here,~~ And I told her you go and see the rabbi and tell him to notify our parents and also buy bread. They allowed her to go and when the kids went downstairs out in the yard they actually ^{felt like} ~~kissed~~ the earth, that's how they were. I began to talk with this officer, a young officer. It turns out that we were in the same class in college in [?] ~~Wiper~~ that we had the same professor so we were colleagues. Now we can talk friendly.

Q. But he was a Russian, no he was a Pole?

A. Before the war he was ^{in (?) before the war,} just as I was there. What were you arrested for? [?] I said I don't know. I didn't do a damn thing, we don't know why. Come into the office.

Q. He was not a Jew was he?

A. No. We came into the office and he wrote out ^{certificates} ~~specific~~ that ^{and this is...} they checked, and that we are perfect and devoted and dedicated to the ^{place} interests of Poland and gave it to me. I came, I got it and ^{said} let's go ' ^{and said, No.} everybody he gave it to all of us let's go and as we went actually you met soldiers and by the way we heard already that that doctor in her home town they tied him to the tail of a horse and dragged him until he died. That's what ~~they~~ did.

Q. Who did that, the peasants?

A. ^{Not the peasants, the army.} The Poles. So we came there and again an army train. We showed our papers, ^{that we} ~~they~~ were so good and we got into the train and we went on the way to ^{Brest} ~~Resk~~ and from ^{Brest Pinsk} ~~Resk~~ to ^{Pinsk} ~~Spinsch~~ and from ^{Warsaw} ~~Spinsch~~ we drove to ^{Wallaeh} ~~Wallaeh~~ and lo and behold ^{Brest on the depot on} in the station I noticed this officer who used to play cards who caused the whole trouble. He noticed me too. He began to run around looking for me. Luckily the train moved, ^{we} ~~so~~ we went away. We came to Warsaw, ^{we} ~~we~~ went to a hotel. There we were ^{free people in a} ~~created~~ big city.

Q. This was now what year were you in, 1919?

A. 1919. ^{The fighting was between the Poles and the...}

Q. So for them the war was over. So for them it was a new Poland by that time.

A. So we came there and had to get visas to get to America.

Q. That's where you wanted to go.

A. We met the delegate and we had the money already but to get visas you had to stand in line day and night, ^{We} stood there for a week, ^{we} couldn't get it

Couldn't get a visa, ^{ment} and here we are here in bombarding and the Russians

are coming closer. Warsaw was filled with these would be passengers

immigrants to America. ^{these} Women came here. All the delegates were

there to collect the money, ^{who took them out. Otherwise they'd be cut off.} We felt that the first obligation we had was

that her niece, her husband sent money, ^{and he wants her.} We bought a visa for her, false

visa. Looked like a real one but it was false. We paid money for ^{it} ~~us~~. At

least she is safe. And we decided everything cost money, ^{we} decided to go

to ^{Danzig} ~~Dante~~ and we went and there is a long story about our trip there.

Finally we came to ^{Danzig} ~~Dante~~ no visas, Polish passport but the Polish passport

had my occupation as a doctor. ^{doctore} I told them I am a student but they put

doctor down a doctor. That did us a great deal of good in ^{Danzig} ~~Dante~~ and that's

how we got out.

Q. At that time ^{Danzig} ~~Dansich~~ was ^{Danzig} ~~Dansich~~ a free city at that time?

A. It was a free city it was German and you had to go through the border line.

Q. ^{Danzig} ~~Dansich~~ was German at that time?

A. That's right.

Q. It was in German territory but a free city is that it.

A. Later, ^{It was} it was a free city. A German city and Germany was about ready to become-to have the revolution then.

Q. Their post war revolution, right. I see.

A. Because I became acquainted with two doctors in ^{Danzig} ~~Dansich~~, there were about 50,000 immigrants, ^{or} there was a prison camp and they used that to keep us. There was no room, so people slept on the street there in the open in the rain. It was awful. I having to sign doctore I came and took a

chance I came to the doctor and I said that my wife is not well and another one I would like to put them in the hospital and that was the worst thing ~~one~~ ^{one} ~~wrong~~ to do. That was the rumor if you were in the hospital you are a sick person so why should they let you come to America. But we came in a clean bath and you had your freedom. The next day I became acquainted with the doctors and one of them said why do you go to America why don't you go back. Russia is coming soon. From the history of religion they will be here. Well a nurse comes over to me the following day, they have a patient and the doctors want ~~to sit down and write it.~~ ^{you to come and advise them.} Well I had no choice. I came there, there was a youngster, a son of the immigrant, who was lying in bed and almost, the doctor didn't know what was wrong with him, a Jewish fellow. So I asked ~~they used to give us there~~ ^{me pound of} the mother, what did he eat. They used to give us there a box of some kind of jam and bread, that's all they could have. And this fellow ate a pound of ^{So naturally} jam, so he didn't eat anything today and he didn't eat anything yesterday but the day before yesterday, he had a whole pound. ^{It} was sweet and he ate it. I said, give him an enema and I walked out.

Q. My husband the doctor.

A. I walked out as fast as I could, ^{praying to God.} Nothing happened. Lo and behold he became well they gave him an enema he became well. Some people who were ^{that's the only way you could get,} in the holocaust the only way they could get by and come out alive, ^{is to do it that's what they used to do.} ^{three chatz paks,} otherwise that's why, very often, when they came and I had experience with them here, they didn't trust anybody. It played havoc especially with the younger ones.

Q. You mean the Jews who had been through that didn't want to trust

anybody?

A. They wouldn't trust anybody because that is how they managed to get out.

Q. By not trusting anybody.

A. By not trusting by being alert and watchful and not telling the truth to anybody just keep on doing for yourself that's how they managed otherwise couldn't. *Many* You couldn't anyhow, but this is the only thing that saved them.

Nerve, a lot of nerve and
A Not trusting. I had a pupil who came here to New York. Couldn't make her to trust anybody because she experienced already, ~~she~~ was raped and she wouldn't trust any men anymore. *No* matter what I tried to tell her to make her feel good and so on and the kids in the class, *She wouldn't* and she probably is *a problem even* now.

That is the story of my coming to America.

Q. Tell me, Mr. Woll, you were a socialist but you were not a Bolshevik.

A. I was a *Menshevik*.

Q. So that was part of your problem there.

A. That's right that was why I was condemned by the Bolsheviks. I was a leader among the students, *in the Mensheviks*.

Q. Well I just want to look through here because I've been here a long time, partly because of the fact that we did have company. I'll just ask you one more question. When you were living in *Gomel* ~~Gomel~~ before the war, and even up to the Revolution, the non-Jews in *Gomel* ~~Gomel~~ were what, were they Russians. They were not Poles and they were not Ukrainians.

A. Maybe some of them they were Poles but to us they were all Russians they may have been Poles and Catholics and may have been what they call a Russian *pravoslavnic*, *Y* Gregorians.

Q. I mean do you know what they were, what they considered themselves to be, not who governed them.

A. Russian.

Q. Did they speak Russian.

A. Yes.

Q. Now before the Revolution, during your early years then, did you feel as a boy-let me put it another way, what was the percentage of Jews in ^{Gomel} ~~Gomel~~ compared to non-Jews. Was it a third or a half or less . . .

A. It was less than half. Less than half but quite a community.

Q. Okay so it was a good sized community, close to half. Now would you say that there was, did you experience real anti-semitism before that time?

A. The mere fact about the gymnasia. We didn't, socially we never met with the Russians.

Q. You did not.

A. Didn't have anything to do with them. Two worlds, two separate different worlds. We had a neighbor, ^{to our} ~~to the~~ house, a gentile, and we couldn't make ^{up our minds} ~~out of his~~ ^{is} he friendly or not? At times he would be friendly. . .

Q. So who were your friends, mostly family.

A. Only Jews. ^{Among Jews and Jews} We had no friends with ~~others~~ ^{the Gentiles}.

Q. Now your father's business for example, did he deal with non-Jews too?

A. Yes he did. He dealt with non-Jews too.

Q. Like these geese people that would come. Were they all Jews?

The people who bought up the geese and would come and eat in your house.

A. Jews, only Jews. But you see dealing with a non-Jew it was *a priori* known you ~~had to take that~~ *have to pay graft*. So father used to, dealing with the railroad people, *a car and so on*, because you had to have favors about the train, he used to give gifts around them so they were friendly. How friendly were they I don't know. As a matter of fact across the street from where we lived, there was a gentile woman who used to have quite a garden and we used to buy lettuce from her and things of this sort and we called her friendly but her son was *an open* ~~the same~~ *anti Semite*.

Q. So it was different than really *when shtetel* in the ~~state~~ in a way. You were dealing— correct me if I am wrong—in the city you were dealing, were you dealing with— like your neighbors, were they on a level with you in income or were they like lower?

A. *they were* On a level, they were some were as intelligent as we were. Some of them went but the average were lower in culture.

Q. Was the difference as great as it was in the *shtetel* ~~state~~ between the Jew in the *shtetel* ~~state~~ and the villager.

A. Oh yeah, that was a definite difference.

Q. Was that true in *Gomel* ~~Gomel~~, no everybody was more urban.

A. That was a different kind of breed because they went to grade school *lower* they didn't go high but they went to *lower* grade and then they had a newspaper they read. The peasants didn't. The peasants didn't know how to read. These were in town so they knew.

Q. So that already made a difference.

A. But anti-semitism was prevalent among them too, because you see that was the basis—that a Jew didn't produce anything. He used what somebody *else*

produced to sell it and make money on that and that was the basis of zionism that we felt as long as we are not producing our own bread we will always be dependent. ^{Here} now we have it now here in America about energy, about oil. You never heard so much said about becoming independent, producing your own energy, because otherwise we were dependent. So that was the idea of Zionism.

Q. You cleared something up because I was thinking to myself how could you be a member of ^{Poale Zion} ~~politcheen~~ and at the same time be a communist because that would be like a contradiction almost.

A. Of course it was. That's why we couldn't and that's why ^{we} ~~they~~ were ^{persecuted} ~~harassed~~ (?) with it.

Q. Right, I understand. Okay, I am going to say thank you very much.

A. You're welcome I am sure.